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PERFORMING ARTS COMMITTEE FOR CIVIL LIBERTIES

For the past 18 months, we have watched as the Reagan Administration, spurred on by an alarming coalition of right-wing preachers and television evangelists, has mounted a widespread assault on constitutional rights. We, like you, have talked among ourselves about those threats, and have wondered how to respond.

We believe the time for talk is over. We believe it's time to act.

Consider what has happened already:

- A systematic campaign is underway to subject children in public schools to fundamentalist religious indoctrination; to conduct prayer sessions, to require the teaching of the Biblical story of creation in science classes, and to eliminate from school libraries "immoral" books by authors like Bernard Malamud, Langston Hughes and Kurt Vonnegut.

- President Reagan has signed a new executive order that confirms and expands the authority of the CIA and other intelligence agencies to engage in many of the worst abuses of the Nixon Administration, including wiretapping, infiltration of political groups, political burglaries and mail openings.

- In the House of Representatives, a petition is circulating to revive the House Un-American Activities Committee. And 158 members of the House have signed it!

- More and more the federal government is claiming the authority to withhold from citizens information about what it is doing, while expanding its power to censor what citizens may publish. A new executive order vastly increases the power of officials to stamp documents "classified," whether or not such documents contain real secrets vital to our nation's security. And the CIA is pressing Congress for a total exemption from the Freedom of Information Act. What the government wants is the authority to do its business free from democratic debate or dissent.

- Hostility towards homosexuals is finding its way into law. In Oklahoma, teachers may now be fired for speaking out on the subject. In Louisiana, a pending law would require teachers to specify their sexual preference when applying for a job. In Congress, laws have been proposed to bar federal funds to colleges that permit gay rights organizations, and to prohibit legal services lawyers from representing homosexuals.

- Perhaps most dangerous of all is a new and concerted effort to limit the authority of the federal courts--those courts that were designed to give citizens the means to enforce their constitutional rights. Dozens of proposals are being considered in Congress that would prohibit federal courts from even hearing many constitutional cases. If that happens, state legislatures would be able to restrict the right to abortion, permit racial discrimination, or impose religious ceremonies in public schools--and federal courts would be powerless to stop them, even if such laws clearly violated the Constitution. Our rights would remain on paper--but there would no longer be an effective remedy when they were violated! No more radical effort to upset our system of checks and balances has ever been so seriously considered.